

**Black-Tailed Prairie Dog Life Cycle**  
Work Sheet

Based on the following, construct a time-line for the black-tailed prairie dog life cycle and answer the questions. Black-tailed prairie dogs breed once per year, starting in January. Gestation period is 34 to 35 days. Litter size is from one to six pups. Pups remain underground for six weeks and emerge in May or June. The pups are weaned when they are about seven weeks old. By the end of fall, the pups are nearly full-grown. It takes two years for the males to reach sexual maturity, but the young females can breed as yearlings. The young females stay with the coterie, and the young males leave in the spring (disperse in May or June) before their first breeding season. Prairie dogs are curious animals that are very entertaining to observe. Since prairie dogs are diurnal and herbivorous, they usually can be observed feeding early and late in the day. Optimum times for observation are about two and one half hours after sunrise and two hours before sunset. Population counts should be done when the maximum number of prairie dogs are above ground, which is one and one half to two and one half hours before sunset in late May when the juveniles have emerged.

**Time-Line of Life Cycle**

JAN	
FEB	
MAY	
APR	
MAY	
JUN	
JUL	
AUG	
SEP	
OCT	
NOV	
DEC	

1. If you needed to observe reproductive behavior, when would you go to the field?
2. If you were studying the disbanding of yearling males, when would you do your observations?
3. If you did a prairie dog population count, what time of year and day would be best?
4. If you were to capture (trap) a coterie for relocation to establish a colony at a new site, when would be the optimum time to do this?
5. If you were doing a predation study, when would be the best time to make observations?

**Define the following terms**

6. Gestation period
7. Weaned
8. Sexual maturity
9. Diurnal
10. Herbivorous